

Changing India

Bourgeois Revolution on
the Subcontinent

Second Edition

Robert W. Stern

 **CAMBRIDGE**
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Robert W. Stern 2003

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1993
Second edition first published 2003

Printed in China by Everbest Printing Co.

Typeface Adobe New Aster 9/12 pt. *System* QuarkXPress® [BC]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

National Library of Australia Cataloguing in Publication data

Stern, Robert W., 1933– .

Changing India: bourgeois revolution on the subcontinent.

2nd ed.

Includes index.

ISBN 0 521 81080 9.

ISBN 0 521 00912 X (pbk).

1. India – History – British occupation, 1765–1947.
2. India – History – 1947– . 3. India – Social conditions.

I. Title.

954

ISBN 0 521 81080 9 hardback

ISBN 0 521 00912 X paperback

Contents

List of maps and tables xi

Preface to the second edition xii

Glossary xiv

Introduction: Change, the societies of India and Indian society 1

Part I The changing countryside 33

- 1 Families and villages 35
- 2 Caste 56
- 3 Class 88
- 4 Homelands and states 107

Part II Change from above 129

- 5 British imperialism, Indian nationalism and Muslim separatism 131
- 6 The Indian Union in a changing India 171

x Contents

Appendix One: Major political events in the related histories of British imperialism and Indian nationalism, 1858–1947 217

Appendix Two: Major political events in the history of the Indian Union, 1947–2002 220

Notes 224

Guide to further reading 232

Index 245

Maps and tables

Maps

- 1 The Indian Union in 2002 2
- 2 The Mughal empire, 1526 to 1707 17
Reproduced from *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka*, p. 100.
- 3 The British empire in India, c.1900 128
Reproduced from *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka*, p. 117.

Tables

- 1 Operational Holdings of Farm Family Households (Ch. 3) 95
- 2 India's Position on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Indexes (Ch. 6) 183

Introduction

Change, the societies of India and Indian society

Bourgeois revolution and change

This book is about contemporary Indian society and how it is changing. More than a billion people live in India. Of every six people in the world, one is an Indian. Contemporary Indian society is heir to one of the world's great, enduring and eclectic civilizations. It permeates the entire Indian subcontinent, and its influence is manifest throughout Asia. In contemporary Indian society there are old ways that retain their vibrancy, their credibility and influence, and prevail. But, there are new ways as well: in a lively and well-established parliamentary democracy, a stable quasi-federal republic, programs of social and economic reform, modern agriculture and industry, science and technology, literature and art. In the meetings of old and new ways there are synergies no less than contradictions. Over the past decade or so, India has become an important player in the global economy. An increasingly assertive, nuclear- and missile-armed Indian Union is a major power today in Asia, the Indian Ocean and the world.

So, India is changing. Of course, it has always been changing: only the pace of change has varied from time to time, group to group and locality to locality. This insight of Hindu and Buddhist antiquity is apposite: change is the condition of everything that lives. Change is the condition of social continuity. Change may be barely perceptible even to those who experience it directly or it may be, as it is in India today, self-evident, rapid and profound. There may be ideological or pragmatic reasons for denying that change has occurred or for disguising its occurrence. But there is always change.

It may, from a variety of causes, follow some dominant pattern. My argument is that nowadays the *dominant* pattern of change in India is what Barrington Moore, Jr. calls “bourgeois revolution.” Moore defines his revolutions by the “broad institutional results to which they contribute.”¹ Bourgeois revolution’s essential institutional contribution is to the development *together* (allowing for leads and lags) of capitalism and parliamentary democracy. In my meaning, this development is synonymous with bourgeois revolution. It began in India and continues as a revolution from the top down. Increasingly as it proceeds, however, combining and incorporating elements in a society that long antedates it, it has become as well a revolution upward from expanding middle classes.

“Much of the confusion and unwillingness to use larger categories,” like bourgeois revolution, Moore tells us, is because “those who provide the mass support for a revolution, those who lead it, and those who ultimately profit from it are very different sets of people.” There is little confusion in India but that bourgeois revolution’s leaders, families that have profited by it or even directly experienced its changes, have come largely from the middle classes. In general terms, these classes are comprised chiefly of families whose incomes are derived from employment in the educated professions (including politics, many of whose practitioners these days have been schooled at Hard Knocks), managerial and other higher salaried positions in modern industry and commerce, ownership of urban capital and of family farms that are engaged in commercial agriculture. While they have established their hegemony over most spheres of Indian public life, these classes are neither closed nor entirely self-perpetuating. Accompanying bourgeois revolution in India, and congruent with it, is substantial and accelerating embourgeoisement – the migration of new entrants into the ranks of the middle classes.

In the chapters of part I, I have focused my argument on the contributions of bourgeois revolution to changes in the basic social institutions of rural India and in the lives and fortunes of the seven out of ten Indian families that live in their country’s more than 600,000 villages and country towns. More and more, villages and their villagers’ institutions – families, castes and religious communities – are bringing themselves and being brought into the political and economic streams of a wider provincial and Indian society. Without replacing caste as India’s customary social system, particularly of its countryside, class has increasingly impinged its secular values and considerations onto the sacred values and considerations of caste. The communitarian ties within castes and caste fragments have been strengthened by their participation as players and vote banks in provincial and national politics, and as actors in the countryside’s institutions of civil society. Indian states have become at once the seats of vibrant, bare-knuckle, grass-roots democracies, and the constituent units of a stable and parliamentary democratic Indian multi-nation state.

4 *Changing India*

Urban India is the focus of part II. Its chapters chart the general course in India of bourgeois revolution. Initially, its political and economic impetus was provided by the interaction between British imperialism and Indian urban elites. From the late nineteenth century, bourgeois revolution was domesticated in the subcontinent's nationalist movements: most critically, in the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Since Independence in 1947, bourgeois revolution has been promoted and institutionalized by Congress Party governments and, more recently, by their successors at the Centre – the central government – in New Delhi and in the states of the Indian Union.

For my purposes, the concept of bourgeois revolution makes up for its theoretical shortcomings with its limited usefulness: its manageability and malleability. I use the concept to serve the purpose of organizational economy: the binding into one small volume of material that is virtually boundless. Arguments, it hardly needs to be said, are arguable. There are no definitive statements on the pages that follow. I use bourgeois revolution to serve the purpose of explanation. I do not imagine, however, that it explains everything. It is the *dominant* pattern of change in Indian society only in the sense that it describes the general direction of its political and economic development, and concomitant changes. There are crosscurrents and shores untouched by bourgeois revolution. It describes, in part, the recent revival of political Hinduism, for example. But changes in religious Hinduism, it hardly describes at all. It does not describe the proletarianization of small farm families, although their numbers may be no less than those of the families that have become *embourgeoisées*. The development in tandem, more or less, of capitalism and parliamentary democracy has not, or not yet, substantially effected any fundamental structural change in Indian society. Indeed, a recurring theme throughout this study is of the compatibility, adaptability and, even, functionality of long-lived Indian social structures to bourgeois revolution.

Is it really a “revolution” at all, then? My best answer is twofold. First, to concur with Moore that the “main problem, after all, is what happened and why, not the proper use of labels.” We are not unused to questionable labels in Indian studies. In chapter 2, we encounter the label “sanskritization.” It certainly described what *was* happening, but the label was regarded as misleading even by the distinguished anthropologist who designed it. Second, in chapters to follow, I hope this becomes clear: the development *together* in India of capitalism and parliamentary democracy has brought basic political, economic and social changes to the rapidly growing middle classes. Their families number in the hundreds of millions and they have become the directors and constituencies of political and economic change. Like any revolution, bourgeois revolution is partial in its own way.

There was and is no inevitability about bourgeois revolution in India. Capitalism and parliamentary democracy have not always developed together. They need not have in India. If, for example, from the latter decades of the nineteenth century, the British had been more successful in encouraging the collective participation in Indian politics of their client Indian princes and they, in turn, had had the foresight to participate collectively and seek the alliance of the new classes of Indian industrialists, we might now have no Indian bourgeois revolution to argue about. It is also possible that bourgeois revolution may be only a misunderstood and passing phase in India's history. Although this seems less likely today than it did in 1992. Certainly, bourgeois revolution has yet to reach more than a proportion – albeit, a substantial and growing proportion – of Indian families.

What proportion? It is accurate enough for us and convenient to follow India's National Council of Applied Economic Research and identify the Indian bourgeoisie as members of those families, rural and disproportionately urban, that constitute the rapidly growing upper income-earning half of Indian households: those designated by the NCAER as middle-middle, upper-middle and upper income groups.² To be sure, between the lower and upper edges of this range there are great differences in the capacity of households to purchase goods and services, and the same income buys more or less in different locations. But so it is for middle classes, however designated, in other places. Indian economic statistics, which in this case (as in most) should be understood as suggestive, indicate that this upper 50 percent of income-earning households account for about 70–75 percent of Indian household expenditure.³ Given the prevalence within this privileged half of holdings in excess of legal land ceilings, black money and other under- and undeclared assets, its actual control of India's wealth is likely to be greater than the statistics suggest.

NCAER data indicate that the economic advantages that are enjoyed today by an upper half of Indian income-earning households were enjoyed a decade ago by about half that percentage. Statistics confirm what, I think, is self-evident to most observers: embourgeoisement in India has been rapid and profound. For those who demand statistics, embourgeoisement can be fairly well inferred from the coincident doubling over the past decade or so of household savings – a statistically understated middle-class phenomenon – and the more-than-doubling over the past decades of particularly middle-class consumption: of electricity for domestic use, for example, which trebled over the twenty years to 1990 and has trebled again since then. Or automobile (including taxi) registration, which has increased eightfold since 1970, and the registration of “two-wheelers” – the iconic vehicle of middle middle-class families – which is 50 times greater than it was 30 years ago. The production of refrigerators for domestic use is 30 times greater than it was

in 1970 and the production of consumer electronics has more than doubled in the past decade.⁴ Also, in the past decade, the provision of services – most of them consumed and/or attended to by middle-class families – has outstripped both agriculture and industry to become the largest sector in the Indian economy.⁵



The culmination of bourgeois revolution in India is no less likely to be a momentous event in world history than the transformation of China into a modern industrial state. Why is there so little understanding of this in the West? Three explanations, at least, come to mind: the methodology and underlying ideology of development economics, the rhetoric of Indian politics and economic planning, and our Western images of India.

Development economics tends to measure change in per capita terms. And in these terms, poverty is certainly more notable in India than is embourgeoisement. India's Planning Commission estimates that the percentage of Indians living below its poverty line has decreased from 36 percent in 1992–93 to 27 percent in 1999–2000.⁶ 270 million people! To this figure we must add the tens of millions of Indians who are poor by any measure, other than that they manage to subsist above the official poverty line. India still provides the world with its largest national pool of poor people and illiterates, and the amelioration of their poverty and illiteracy over the decades has been slow. But India's development is not taking place here. It is not taking place per capita or among the poor. It is taking place in its expanding middle classes.

For development economists, the poor are the focus of change.⁷ But in India they are neither the focus of change, nor the directors of change, nor their primary constituency. Nor are the poor the major participants in change, and they are certainly not its major beneficiaries. Neither are they likely to become so: not through proletarian revolution – whose occurrence becomes increasingly unlikely as bourgeois revolution proceeds – nor by “direct action” campaigns, nor by capturing the instrumentalities of parliamentary democracy, nor by dragging bourgeois revolution to a halt with the inertia of their poverty. The poor are certainly not passive. They are increasingly assertive. They affect the course of change and its pace, including the pace of embourgeoisement. They are the recipients of some varying and significant, managed and incidental trickle-down effects of bourgeois revolution. But the engine of change is in the hands of the middle classes, and they use it, not exclusively, but primarily, to serve themselves. Explicit and implicit government subsidies to the rural middle classes, for example, are far more generous than government expenditure on its various poverty alleviation programs. While the standard (Gini) index of income

equality/inequality for India is much the same as it is for, say, the United States and the United Kingdom, the implications of income inequality in India are starker and bleaker. Thus, for example,

... in 1992–3, compared to the richest 20 percent of Indians, the poorest quintile had about 2.5 times the infant mortality and under-five mortality rates, double the fertility rate, and nearly 75 percent higher rates of child mortality ... [T]he [school] enrollment rate is 25 percentage points lower for the poorest households ... than for the richest households ... And the drop-out rate for the poorest households is about four times that of the richest ones.⁸

Sadly, this is unlikely to have changed much in a decade. So, measured in terms of the welfare of the other half of India's population, bourgeois revolution is a stunning failure. I do not want to be mistaken for one of bourgeois revolution's apologists. I do not invite development economists to be its apologists. They are doubtlessly correct in their assumption that reducing poverty is the straightest path to accelerating development. But that is not the path of bourgeois revolution in India. And it is unlikely to be made so by World Bank exhortations. Things are as they are. Development economists might be of greater assistance in describing them if, for example, they continue to turn some of their efforts in refining poverty lines to the construction of embourgeoisement thresholds and trickle-down indicators.

In India's constitution, its nine successive five-year plans, hundreds of its party manifestos, thousands of its laws and myriad speeches of its politicians, there is an ostensible commitment to a process of change whose chief beneficiaries are "the poor." "Socialism," once the talisman of economic development, even among Congressmen, has been largely abandoned, even by Communists. Indira Gandhi decorated her "emergency" of 1975–77, her assumption of dictatorial power, with the slogan, *Garibi Hatao* – abolish poverty. But it was only a slogan. Today Indian politics is befogged by assertions and counter-assertions, accusations and counter-accusations, among politicians of all parties as to why their policies and not those of their opponents are truly "pro-poor." This is not entirely the meaningless hypocrisy and meaningful fakery of politicians and their minions. It serves, for example, to give governments a legitimate purpose and the governed of the nether half legitimate demands. But it no more serves to describe the realities of change in Indian society nor the role of Indian governments in making them real than did the chimera of "socialism." Like the economists' poverty lines, the rhetoric of Indian politicians has drawn attention away from what is happening to what is not happening.

With regard to our Western images of India, this is what I wrote in the introduction to *Changing India's* first edition:

India is ... rather like a supermarket that specializes in exotica, that caters to our fantasies and our nightmares. We pick things off its shelves for our use, without knowing how they got there or where they came from. India supplied its poverty and superstitions to the vocations of Christian missionaries. It supplied its spiritual insights to the enlightenment of European scholars and litterateurs. Its "underdevelopment" supplied the United States for almost two decades with a cause in Asia worthy of its surplus wheat and university graduates. Its plans for development and their implementation have supplied Western economists of all persuasions with grist for their publishers' mills, consultancies and anecdotes. For the perplexed and disillusioned among us, India supplies the dispensations of its itinerant swamis and guru-entrepreneurs. Its horror stories of bride burnings and female infanticide and human sacrifices, apparently provide for readers of our afternoon tabloids some variation from more familiar horrors and some assurance that however bad things are in New York or Northern Ireland they are worse in Calcutta and Bihar.

How much has changed in a decade? My guess is, not much. With the notable exception of Britain, where India and Indians and things Indian have established a presence, they remain very much on the periphery of our concerns. Compared to the coverage afforded to China and/or Japan by our quality media, the space allotted by them to news from India is sparse and most generous when we are part of the story or when it speaks to our interests or threatens us. The visit of an American president or an Australian cricket team is news. So is our vision of the Indian middle class as an omnivorous consumer of Western goods. India's relationship to Washington's "war on terrorism" is news, as is our worry about India's gate-crashing into our nuclear club. When the story is mostly about India, it tends to reinforce our stereotypes: naked *sadhus*, the colorful costumes of Rajasthani women, Bombay's *dhabawalas*, bandit queens and monkey men, and above all, the frenzy of religious "fundamentalism." Hindu zealots wreck a mosque in Ayodhya, and murder a Christian missionary in Orissa. Enraged Muslims incinerate a train-load of Hindu pilgrims, and a thousand people die in the aftermath of communal hatred. A couple that dared to marry across the barriers of caste are lynched by their relatives. These things, of course, have happened. But other things have happened as well, and are happening. One of them, the extraordinary emergence of India as a lively, genuine and stable parliamentary democracy is the central story of this book.

Alas, the stories of South Asia told by our university scholars have never had more than small audiences and readerships. South Asian studies have always been on the margin of our university curricula, and they have probably been further marginalized by recent inventions and reinventions of universities as service industries. Indian migrants to our silicon valleys have not come to bring us into their stories, but to make it in ours. From the spate of English-language novels set in India, the stories are mostly about the urban Indian middle classes. They are people like the novels' authors, and like us.⁹ Things Indian – art and artifacts – are still largely fashion items. Exotica. And fashions change. I recall Ravi Shankar's musings in Sydney some years ago. "It's the sitar here today," he said, "tomorrow it will be the koto."



And what of the day after tomorrow? Consider. India is the second most populous country in the world. In no small measure as a consequence of governmental efforts that have succeeded in halving the general death rate and doubling the life expectancy of Indians at birth, India's population has trebled since it became an independent nation. To all but its Jeremiahs, this "population explosion" is much less worrisome now than it appeared to be in the 1960s. India's population is larger than it has ever been. But it is also healthier and more literate. It continues to grow, but at a decelerating rate. India nowadays produces more than enough food to feed itself. Once a land of famines, India is now a net exporter of food grains and famine is as unlikely there as it is in the United States. There are still hungry people in India, far too many of them; but they are a shrinking proportion of the Indian population, and their plight is a consequence not of the scarcity of food but – as is poverty in the West – of the maldistribution of income.

Increases in all food and other crops – cotton and sugarcane, for example – proceeded from land reform legislation of the 1950s and 1960s that virtually eliminated non-cultivating landlords from the business of agriculture and located agricultural production squarely in the hands of tens of millions of village households whose families own and cultivate small farms. In addition, government sponsored the consolidation of the fragmented holding of village farm families, established price and production incentives for farmers, expanded the area of cultivation, developed agricultural extension and research agencies, expanded credit and marketing facilities, facilitated a trebling of the area under irrigation and a manifold increase in the consumption of chemical fertilizers. Since the late 1960s, when the application of Green Revolution technology¹⁰ to Indian agriculture began, the production of rice has more than doubled, the production of wheat more than trebled. Except for its cotton, jute and tea, a rural slum of the British empire before

Independence, the Indian Republic has become one of the world's two major producers of food crops.

Accompanying the post-Independence success of Indian agriculture is a social paradox. While on the one hand, India's poverty, illiteracy, its caste oppression and gender inequality, its "backwardness" is most prevalent and enduring in its countryside, on the other hand, it is there that bourgeois revolution in India has had its most critical social effect. When India became an independent republic, more than 90 percent of its population lived in villages, and village societies were overwhelmingly of peasants: of cultivators who were subject to political, economic, social and ideological direction by superordinate classes of non-cultivators – moneylenders; resident and absentee, aristocratic and capitalist landlords; imperial law-makers and bureaucrats. Here bourgeois revolution is social revolution. Nowadays, the combination of cultivator ownership, agricultural development and parliamentary democracy at state and local levels has turned that 20-to-25 percent of village households with viable holdings into families of farmers: no more subject than their counterparts in Iowa or Queensland to the direction of their non-cultivating betters.

In their economy and élan, the upper quintile-to-quartile of India's cultivating proprietors are capitalist: legally secure in their tenure, producing for an anonymous market, acquisitive, enterprising, socially mobile, exploitative of their laborers, ambitious for their children, politically assertive and *the* force to be reckoned with in local and state politics. Proper bourgeois! But, for the most part, petit bourgeois: only relatively large small-holders, rich only in comparison with the poor. Farming in India is overwhelmingly the small business of household families. Of these, fewer than 2 percent farm ten or more hectares. The annual incomes of only the richest farm households would even approximate those of successful urban professional men and women. Proper bourgeois! But not of closed middle classes. Inheritance and the market have taken their toll. Since 1970, the average size of farm holdings and the areas cultivated by large farmers have declined as percentages of the whole.

Many of the households with smaller holdings belong to families whose castes fall into the constitutional and political category of "Other Backward Classes." Typically groups of yesterday's small-holding peasants of plebian caste, today's OBCs are the New Men and Women of India. Over the past decade, the increasing power of OBC castes in caste-based or related politics at state and local levels, the crucial role of popularly elected state governments in apportioning political and economic favor, the non-existence of economies of scale in much of Green Revolution commercial agriculture and the assiduous use by small farmers of family labor: all have substantially eroded the post-Independence social and political status quo in village India. And all of this has set tens of millions of households of small-holders with

middle-class aspirations on the route from peasantry to embourgeoisement. Following in the wake of OBC politics, rural India's most numerous landless underclass, known variously as scheduled castes, untouchables, Harijans (God's people), and, now, Dalits (the oppressed), have fought in the past decade as never before for political power, personal security and social honor.



Since 1970, the annual production of finished steel in India has increased more than fivefold, as has the production of commercial vehicles. The value of machine tools manufactured annually has grown from approximately the recent equivalents of less than US\$10 million to more than US\$400 million. Industrial production, in general, has more than doubled. Installed capacity for the generation of electricity has increased from about 16.3 million kilowatts to more than 105 million kilowatts, and the generation of electricity has increased more than eightfold to about 500 billion kilowatts. Chemical fertilizer production, which was about one million tonnes in 1970, is now about 14 million tonnes. Surfaced roads have increased in length from less than 400,000 kilometers to more than 1.5 million kilometers. Railway travel has doubled and freight-tonne kilometers have trebled. What was a fledgling motorcycle and scooter industry in 1970, is now one of the world's largest, producing more than 3 million vehicles each year. In the last decade or so, an electronics industry has sprung into being. It produces a full range of computer hardware and software, modern communications equipment and consumer electrical goods. This included about 3.5 million television sets in 1999–2000, double the number of five years earlier. Now major producers in the world of computer software, information technology companies in India have since the mid-1990s increased tenfold the value of their software production for export.

From Independence until little more than a decade ago, India's industrialization developed and languished within the confines of a planned economy, behind the barriers of an import-substitution policy, below the "commanding heights" of a dominant and uncompetitive public sector, inside a labyrinth of government rules and regulations pertaining to private sector industries and foreign participation in them. Within these confines, Indian industry and India as a great industrial nation were meant to develop. And they did. But the confines outlasted their usefulness. While much of Asia was booming in the 1980s, India's national income grew at an annual average rate of about 3.5 percent: derided by Indian economists as the "Hindu rate of growth" – the rate at which the economy "keeps growing no matter how badly [the government's] economic policy is formulated."¹¹ That formulation, "Nehruvian socialism," had by the end of the 80s produced the most

regulated and protected, closed, subsidy-ridden, inefficient and corrupt major industrial economy outside of eastern Europe.

From the 1980s, and against the background of the “Asian miracle” in which India was a non-participant, its industrial development policies came under increasing criticism. They kept India far behind South Korea as an industrialized nation, for example, although the countries were on a par of underdevelopment in the 1950s. By 1991, the Indian economy was virtually bankrupt. The “conditionalities” of the International Monetary Fund’s rescue package and the Indian government’s ready acceptance of it added up to the end of “Nehruvian socialism.” Import restrictions were lifted, the public sector was opened to competition from private sector enterprises, their regulation by government was eased and foreign investment encouraged. For a few years during the mid-90s, the Indian economy grew at the extraordinary – for India – annual rate of 7.5 percent. It has since been brought down to the accelerated “Hindu rate” of 5 percent in response to downturns in the international economy and in the Indian government’s enthusiasm for reform: dampened, in no small measure, by the persistence in India of what Pranab Bardhan calls “equity politics” – something for every one of the growing number of groups that have the political muscle to sustain a demand for it.¹² “The opportunity created by the crisis [of 1991] ... dissipated. With no crisis in sight, the old political games involving various vested interests came back into play and the pace of reforms dropped dramatically.”¹³

Equity politics and vested interests have their home in the public sector. It is the legatee of Britain’s bureaucratic empire and yesterday’s economic nationalism. In a wide variety of fields, from the manufacturing of drugs to gold mining, the public sector accounts for about one-quarter of the production of Indian factories. Many of these are “sick units,” neither productive nor profitable. But they serve the interests of those whom they employ, their suppliers and labor unions; the bureaucrats who manage the factories and the politicians who use them to bestow grace and favor. Predictably, the shedding of such enterprises by a democratically elected government, through “disinvestment” – the public sale of a portion of their equities – and privatization, is likely to be sluggish. And sluggish it is.

Alongside the public sector, in the “mixed” Indian economy, private enterprise manufactures a full range of capital, intermediate and consumer goods, operates banks and manages hotel chains, wholesales and retails. Globalization notwithstanding and its consequent penetration of the Indian market by foreign multinational corporations, India’s industrial economy remains overwhelmingly owned and operated by Indians. The great family conglomerates of the old economy, makers of everything from soap to steel, and lesser *crorepatis* (multi-millionaires) who profited under yesterday’s industrial policy continue to profit under today’s. Indian companies of the new high-tech economy – Wipro and Infosys, for example – and the new service industries prosper.

So, too, do smaller fish. Aided by a government policy of reserving certain product lines for their manufacture, thousands of small-business families and entrepreneurs all over India have made small-scale industry into a dynamic sector of their country's economy. These industries of the urban petite and moyenne bourgeoisie have increased their output more than twenty times over since 1970, and they produce about 35 percent of India's exports. In addition to small-business families, whose number has more than quadrupled over the past decade or so, two other groups have added their number to India's urban middle classes. First are the 24 million university graduates who provide India with one of the world's largest national pools of technically and scientifically trained personnel. In India, as elsewhere, universities have been the factories for the production of candidates for embourgeoisement, and for adding numbers and social variety to the urban middle classes. Second are millions of skilled and semi-skilled workers whose bread-and-butter trade unionism has produced pay packets large enough to nurture middle-class aspirations for their children.



No more than Indian industry, has Indian culture been colonized from abroad. It is as powerful and persistent as any culture on earth. It has, of course, borrowed from the European West over the past two centuries, as it borrowed from the Muslim West in earlier centuries. But in almost all things, Indian culture is distinctively Indian. Indian Christianity and Islam are distinctively Indian. The recurring call of Hindu zealots for the "Indianization" of their Christian and Muslim countrymen is as preposterous as would be a call for the "Americanization" of American Jews.¹⁴ For all their borrowings, Indian music and art – including film music and modern and pop art – remain distinctively Indian. So too, Indian cuisines. Most of the books read by Indians are written by Indians and published in India. English-language publishing flourishes in India, but so too does publishing in Indian languages. No worse nor better than the ordinary run of Hollywood films, the ordinary run of Bollywood films provides the foundation for an extraordinarily powerful and pervasive popular culture that is distinctly Indian. It will be clear, I hope, from subsequent chapters that India's political culture has mixed its Indian *masala* into Western parliamentary democracy and taken it for its own, as earlier, India did with other exotic imports such as chili, tea, the violin, nineteenth-century British bureaucracy and railways.

India can govern itself. The political center of Indian society has been occupied for more than a half-century by the Republic of India. In form, it is a quasi-federal, democratic republic whose political authority is constitutionally apportioned between a central parliamentary government in New Delhi, the Centre, and parliamentary governments in all twenty-eight of the Union's constituent states and some of its seven territories. Fifty years ago,

political democracy was an exotic transplant in India. Against all odds, parliamentary democracy has become successfully domesticated, although less as an ideology, perhaps, than as a way of doing political business. Unless disqualified for some particular reason, all adult Indian citizens are enfranchised to vote for the national parliament, their state legislative assembly, local government or municipal council. The Indian electorate is the largest in the world. The proportion of it that usually votes, between 55 and 60 percent, is larger than it is in the United States and, I believe, no less well-informed or more gullible. By any comparative measurement, parliamentary democracy in India is genuine, stable, and adapted to its social environment.

For two decades in the states and three decades at the Centre, the Congress Party of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi monopolized power. These were the years of one-party dominance. They were followed by some more years of unstable coalitions alternating in government with a fading Congress Party. Nowadays, coalition government has become the rule in the states, and a multi-party National Democratic Alliance led by the "Hindu nationalist" BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party – Indian people's party) rules in New Delhi. Thirteen elections for the lower house of the national parliament, the Lok Sabha, have been held since 1952. In six of them, and any number of times in state elections, the party or parties in power have been voted out. And they have gone out. This is my acid test for parliamentary democracy: when, in a reasonably free and fair election, a government is voted out of power, does it surrender its control of the army and the treasury, the home ministry and the national broadcaster, pack up and move to the opposition benches?

In India, as elsewhere, but perhaps more so in India, it is the interests of the middle classes that are best served by parliamentary democracy. As elsewhere, there have been lapses in India's democracy. Ballot boxes have been stuffed and "lost," politicians' hirelings have "captured" polling booths, criminals have exerted political influence and become politicians, political workers have been beaten, politicians have been murdered, voters have been bribed and intimidated, campaign funds have been extorted and collected from black money hoards. From 1975 until she was voted out of power in 1977, *and went* – perhaps, her finest hour – Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, in effect, suspended the workings of India's parliamentary democracy with her tyrannical and self-serving "emergency." Although their power is respected and feared, politicians, in general, enjoy no great reputation in India. There has been hardly a ministry, in the states and at the Centre, unsullied by the evidence of corruption. But by comparative third world standards, the improbity of Indian politicians, though certainly condemnable, is not much more than ordinary. What is extraordinary, by any standards, is that India has become one of the world's stable parliamentary democracies: that Indian politicians and bureaucrats have managed with more than workaday success

to govern democratically and to integrate into one quasi-federal union a population that is generally poor, illiterate, dispersed, parochial, anti-democratic in its cultural biases and larger and more socially diverse than the population of Europe.

Parliamentary democracy, particularly at the state and local levels, has been India's general solvent for threats to domestic order. But when stubborn threats resist dissolution in parliamentary politics, Indian governments have not hesitated to meet violence with violence. The power of the gun is often abused, in India as elsewhere: by police brutality and corruption, indiscipline and partiality, bashings and killings of prisoners, stagings of "encounters" in which "militants" are murdered, insensitivity to the plight of the poor and socially despised. But by and large, state violence has been used successfully in India. Explosive tensions between castes and religious communities have usually been contained. In general, though not without violence, balances have been struck between the rights of Indian citizens to mount civil disobedience campaigns and the concerns of governments to dismount them. There have been a number of armed insurrections in independent India: in districts of West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, in Punjab, perennially in Assam and tribal areas of the northeast, and with no apparent end in sight, in Kashmir. None have threatened the stability or the integrity of the Indian Union. At no small cost in life and to human rights, all have been suppressed or contained. Some have been reconciled.

In little more than half a century, India has fought three wars and a major battle with Pakistan and its proxy *mujahidin* and one disastrous war with China. Nowadays, New Delhi's relations with a nuclear-armed Pakistan are poisonous, and with a nuclear-armed China, uncertain. India's very expensive efforts to maintain a modern military establishment are driven by the usual forces, international and domestic, but among them is an intelligent appreciation of the need to defend itself against real and potential enemies. And India can defend itself. It can make nuclear weapons and send them off by ballistic missiles of its own making. Its military services are well-armed, well-disciplined, well-trained, well-led and subordinate to their political masters. This was most recently demonstrated in the "Kargil War" of 1999.¹⁵

The Indian Army is one of the world's largest and probably one of its best. In recent years, India has put into service a formidable, state-of-the-art "blue water" navy, complete with missile-armed corvettes, an aircraft carrier and modern submarines. The Soviet Union, once India's major arms supplier, has returned to the job as Russia. India's military forces can not only defend it against any present or prospective threat, they can as well show the tricolor. India is clearly the great power not only in South Asia but on the Indian Ocean's littoral, and it expects to be acknowledged as such. In the 1980s, that was the message of New Delhi's interventions into the internal affairs of Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Nepal. India is increasingly dismissive of any

claims by Pakistan to parity with it, and increasingly insistent on being recognized with China as one of the great powers of Asia.

Looking forward from the first decades of the nineteenth century, Tocqueville saw in the United States and Russia what we, looking forward from the beginning of the twenty-first century, may already see in China and reasonably anticipate in India:

There are at the present time two great nations in the world, which started from different points; [their courses are not the same] but seem to tend toward the same end. ... Both of them have grown up unnoticed; and while the attention of mankind was directed elsewhere, they have suddenly placed themselves in the front rank among the nations, and the world learned [of] their existence and their greatness at almost the same time.¹⁶

The societies of India and Indian society

When humankind's attention is directed to India, it will find a society that has, like Europe's, the diversities of a continent and the unities of a civilization. Moreover, these diversities and unities extend to the boundaries of the subcontinent which India shares with Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan. Within these boundaries, as within Europe's, political borders have changed over time and correspond only partially to ethnic boundaries and sometimes cut across them.

To take only the recent past: Early in the sixteenth century, Mughal invaders, out from Afghanistan and led by Babur, the founder of his line, began to build their Indian empire from existing Hindu and Muslim principalities and their fragments. That empire began to disintegrate from the middle of the eighteenth century. At its most extensive, under Aurangzeb, the last of the Great Mughals, his family's patrimony reached from Kabul to the Bay of Bengal, and from the Himalayas to the borders of what is now Tamil Nadu (see map 2). As the Mughal empire disintegrated, the British began to build their empire from its remains. By the middle of the twentieth century, when the British finally surrendered it, their Indian dominion had become the modern world's largest, most valuable and best-administered bureaucratic empire. It was partitioned into the republics of India and Pakistan in 1947. In 1970, Pakistan's eastern province rebelled and seceded with the aid of Indian arms to become Bangladesh. The Republic of Sri Lanka – until 1948 the British colony of Ceylon and not administered as part of the Indian Empire – is certainly a political and social division of the subcontinent. India was ceded the French territory of Pondicherry in 1956; it seized Portuguese Goa in 1961; and it annexed its protectorate, the Hindu



2 The Mughal empire, 1526 to 1707

kingdom of Sikkim, in 1975. The remaining Himalayan kingdoms are Indian protectorates: Nepal less so than Bhutan.

All the subcontinent's present international borders cut across ethnic boundaries. There is a Hindu majority and a Muslim minority of almost 85 million Bengalis in India, most of them in the state of West Bengal. Across the border in Bangladesh, there is a Muslim majority and a Hindu minority of about 130 million Bengalis. Until its discovery by cannabis and trekking enthusiasts, Nepal was best known in the West as the homeland of those doughty mercenary soldiers, the Gurkhas. Over Nepal's eastern border, there are 2.5 million Indian Nepali-speakers who want a "Gorkhaland" state in the Indian Union. Travelling eastward to Punjab: Punjabis, like Bengalis, were divided by the partition of the British Indian Empire. There are about 40 million Punjabis in India, almost all Sikh and Hindu, mostly in the states of Punjab and Haryana. In the Punjab province of Pakistan, there are approximately 100 million Punjabis, almost all of them Muslim. Among all Punjabis, Indian and Pakistani, the "dominant" caste is Jat. Sindh is in Pakistan, but there are about 3 million Sindhi-speakers in India. Now moving southward: more than 60 million Tamils live in India, most of them in the state of Tamil Nadu on the subcontinent's southeastern tip. Less than 100 kilometers away, across the Palk Strait, in Sri Lanka there are another 3.5 million Tamils. In their rebellion against the Sinhalese majority-dominated government of Sri Lanka, its Tamils have been the recipients of covert and not-so-covert moral and logistical support from Indian Tamils. In 1987, the Indian government became embroiled in two years of bloody, futile "peace keeping" in north and northeastern Sri Lanka. India's prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by a Tamil suicide bomber in 1991. The Sinhalese are ethnolinguistically related to the people of the subcontinent's north. Two thousand years ago, the Sinhalese were among the first people to receive the Lord Buddha's message from India.

Religion and religious communities spill across the subcontinent's political borders. India's Muslims, its largest minority, number about 120 million. There are approximately as many Muslims in Hindu-majority India as there are in either Muslim-majority Pakistan or Bangladesh. Together they account for the world's largest geographical concentration of Muslims, more than one-third of their world population. Across political borders, subcontinental Islam is as distinctively subcontinental, as European Christianity is distinctively European. Pakistan's Hindu population is minute, but Bangladesh, following Nepal, has the third largest Hindu population in the world: about 13 million.

Languages, too, cross the subcontinent's political borders. Bengali is the official language of West Bengal and Bangladesh. In both, there is a passionate attachment to their same language. Hindi is the official language of the Indian Union. Urdu is the official language of Pakistan. At the level of

ordinary, day-to-day communications, Hindi and Urdu are basically the same language: except that they are written in different scripts and Urdu has a larger vocabulary of Persian and Arabic loan words and phrases. Because it is the language of Muslim high culture on the subcontinent, Urdu was chosen to be the official language of Pakistan. But Urdu is the mother-tongue of only a minority of Pakistanis, most of them migrants from India. The homeland of Urdu is around and about Delhi. Although they would now identify their language as Hindi, there are probably more Urdu-speaking Hindus in India than there are Urdu-speaking Muslims in Pakistan.

English is the distinctive and distinguishing language of the subcontinental haute bourgeoisie. It is their tool and their symbol. For the lesser bourgeoisie, English is the language of aspiration and opportunity, now more than ever, as India is joined to the global economy. A mastery of written and spoken English is the sine qua non for entrance into the elite bureaucratic services, the officers' mess, the executive suite, the upper reaches of the professions, the circles of artists and intellectuals who are invited to international conferences, the editorial rooms of influential newspapers and journals, the professorates of leading universities, the student bodies and old boys' associations of "great public schools" and fashionable colleges, the company of the distinguished, the beau monde of the best people, the celebrations of the rich, the right clubs and, now crucially for India, the world of the Internet and of India's burgeoning information technology industries.

This reality is little affected by surges from time to time, place to place, and political party to political party of the assertive populism of Indian politicians who decry the use of English and declare that Indian languages alone are truly and self-respectfully Indian. English-language adepts are, to be sure, a minority on the subcontinent, but they are its elites. They are the directors of modernizing change. Their ostensible, public style is modern and they are the exemplars of modernity. In India, their society has become attainable by the upwardly mobile, the beneficiaries of bourgeois revolution. For better or worse, and with varying success, it is English-speaking elites who are leading the subcontinent into the modern world and the modern world into the subcontinent.



Within India itself, diversities abound: of ethnicity, religion and in regard to both the modes and means of production. Along with Sanskrit, which is of great cultural, religious and sentimental significance, but spoken by hardly anyone, the Indian constitution "schedules" 17 widely spoken languages – really language groups. Hindi, across most of north India, has by far the largest number of designated speakers, about 400 million. The half-dozen languages after Hindi, and the approximate number of speakers

attributed to them are: Bengali in the northeast (85 million), Telegu in the southeast (80 million), Marathi in the west (76 million), Tamil in the south (64 million), Urdu primarily in the Hindi-speaking north (52 million), Gujarati in the west (50 million). Speakers in these and all other scheduled language groups are geographically concentrated, as are speakers of European languages in Europe. Other than Sindhi (2.5 million, the language in India of migrants from Sindh, now a province in Pakistan), Urdu and Nepali, every scheduled language group provides the official language of one or more states of the Indian Union – Hindi in the states of northern India, Bengali in West Bengal and Tripura, Telegu in Andhra Pradesh, Marathi in Maharashtra, Tamil in Tamil Nadu, Gujarati in Gujarat, Kannada in Karnataka, Malayalam in Kerala, and so forth. In each state, the majority of its population or a substantial plurality are reckoned to be speakers of its official language.

Of India's ethnic diversity, however, its constitution's scheduled language groups and the official languages of its states are only the surface. Language-speaking in India, as elsewhere, is only a central trait in an ethnic complex of traits. The Marathi-speakers of Maharashtra, for example, are an ethnolinguistic group. They belong to a society that is distinctly Marathi, not only in its language, but in its history, social structure, religious practices, literature and art, customs and manners, diet and dress. The ethnic distinctiveness of Marathis is no less than that of Swedes or Spaniards, for example, nor more than that of Bengalis or Tamils. Moreover, the first language of most people is unlikely to be the scheduled language attributed to them, but rather one of hundreds of "mother-tongues" – dialects – that politicians and their linguists have grouped together to form a scheduled language group.

Some mother-tongues are themselves central traits in an ethnolinguistic complex and some are more or less assimilable than others in the inclusive ethnolinguistic group indicated by its scheduled language. Some mother-tongues that have been grouped together in a scheduled language are mutually intelligible and some are not. In every state there are minorities, whose mother-tongues are included in other states' scheduled language groups or in none of these. About 38 million people speak mother-tongues that are not included in the constitution's scheduled language groups. Most of these people belong to tribal groups, of which there are hundreds in India. In the northeast, some tribal groups – Nagas, Mizos, Bodos, for example – have fought protracted guerrilla wars against the government and/or their non-tribal neighbors to preserve or reclaim their tribal identities. In response, New Delhi has since the 1960s complemented its violent repression of tribal uprisings with attempts to mollify tribal demands by creating six states in each of which particular tribes are a majority or a substantial minority. In 2000, the Indian government carved from three existing states in the



1 The Indian Union in 2002